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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5246  
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1155  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9922  
RUEHKKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4353  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1816  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3549  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0516  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7021  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4640  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0926  
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0930  
RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0654  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2879  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0531  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS  
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001485

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/04/2016

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL BM

SUBJECT: BURMA: UPDATE ON DETAINED PRO-DEMOCRACY LEADERS

RANGOON 00001485 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: P/E Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Nine days after the detention of Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi, and Htay Kywe and five days after the arrest of Pyone Cho and Min Zeya, the regime is taking a harder line, while public frustration is rising. Articles appearing today in the regime's mouthpiece daily paper indicate the GOB is preparing to charge the detained 88 Generation Student leaders under the Unlawful Association Act, which carries a maximum sentence of seven years, a scenario Min Ko Naing had earlier feared. The organization's interim leadership plans to continue their petition campaign until October 16, after which they are considering mass public demonstrations. Some opposition members speculate that the regime has detained the five leaders to use them as bargaining chips during U/SYG Gambari's next visit, releasing them afterward to show their willingness to free political prisoners while continuing to detain Aung San Suu Kyi. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Members of the 88 Generation Students are growing more disturbed as the regime continues to publish articles in government-run daily newspapers accusing the detained leaders of having political and financial links to "illegal associations" outside the country. Today's New Light of Myanmar cited the regime's "evidence," obtained from an intercepted letter addressed to Ko Ko Gyi, that the group received cash from opposition groups based outside Burma. The article could be a sign that the regime is preparing to charge the five leaders under the Unlawful Association Act, which carries a maximum sentence of seven years imprisonment.

¶3. (C) According to the 88 Generation leadership, this was a scenario Min Ko Naing feared most before his arrest, and they have warned their members to be very cautious about contacts.

On October 4, Mya Aye, Min Ko Naing's closest friend, who is acting as interim leader of the 88 Generation Students, told emboffs that the students have already collected 13,000 signatures on petitions calling for the leaders' release. Among those publicly supporting the signature campaign are the famous writer Ludu Daw Ahmar and the dissident comedian Zarganar. The signature campaign is reaching far beyond Rangoon to townships as far away as Mandalay, Mogok, and Pegu.

¶4. (C) Mya Aye said that the outside media has been especially helpful. Exile radio broadcasters are publicizing the signature campaign and the exile media is publishing interviews with families of the five detained leaders that highlight the suffering their prior and current imprisonments cause. Some of our NLD and student contacts speculate that the regime has detained the five to use them as bargaining chips when U/SYG Gambari returns to Burma on his next visit. In their scenario, the regime would release the five leaders to illustrate their willingness to free political prisoners and deflect discussion of freeing Aung San Suu Kyi.

¶5. (C) Mya Aye told emboffs that the 88 Generation Students are considering mass demonstrations after October 16, the deadline they have set to end their signature campaign. They emphasized that they are carefully weighing the potential consequences, including the risk of violence and mass arrests should they decide to proceed. NLD activist Su Su Nwe still plans to personally lead a demonstration in front of Rangoon City Hall if the five are not released. She has told the 88 Generation leadership that she knows she will likely be arrested again, but is willing to take the risk.

¶6. (C) Comment: the latest media articles indicate the regime is preparing a case against the five leaders and will eventually charge and imprison them again. Min Ko Naing, Ko

RANGOON 00001485 002.2 OF 002

Ko Gyi, and Htay Kywe knew that they could be arrested again at any time and left specific instructions for their organization's members to continue participation in human rights and capacity building activities, including American Center seminars. The detained 88 Generation leaders were building productive channels for the energy of young democracy activists who were growing increasingly frustrated with the inaction of the elderly NLD "Uncles." At the same time, the student leaders worked hard to coordinate and cooperate with the NLD and other pro-democracy groups to help unite pro-democracy movements in Burma, the military regime's worst fear. Now, with their leaders re-arrested, the new 88 Generation leaders are angry and frustrated, but committed to continuing their strategies. End Comment.

STOLTZ